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ABSTRACT

A study examined, through comparison, The "New York Times'" coverage of the 1995 women's and men's National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) basketball tournaments. The study sought to answer three questions: (1) Does the "Times" frame the women's event as unimportant?; (2) If so, how?; and (3) What does this say about the "Times'" attitude toward female athletes? A qualitative and quantitative comparison was conducted of the newspaper's coverage of the 3-week event, including the number and length of articles, the size of photos and graphics, placement in the paper and sports section, among other elements. Results indicated that there were three times as many stories, photos, and graphics on the men's tournament as on the women's, and there were 18 features on male players and 6 on their coaches as compared to 2 on female players and 4 on their coaches. Placement on page A1 was almost the same, but men's stories appeared on the front page of the sports section 31 times versus 4 for women. Findings revealed that the frame presented by the "Times" is one of separateness--the women's tournament is the "other" tournament, as opposed to the "real" tournament, played by men. Findings also revealed that the "Times" used stereotypical gender roles as the basis for many stories; for instance, male players were often lauded for their ability to take over the game while female players were praised when they shared the spotlight. (Contains a story breakdown and 120 references.) (CR)

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Full-Court Press?

The New York Times' Coverage of the 1995 Women's NCAA Basketball Tournament

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Presented to: Commission on the Status of Women

AEJMC Convention
August 11, 1996

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Abstract

Through a comparison of The New York Times' coverage of the 1995 women's and men's NCAA basketball tournaments, this study attempts to answer three questions: Does The Times frame the women's event as unimportant? If so, how? What does this say about The Times' attitude toward female athletes? The findings show that The Times frames the event as trivial through its use of writing, graphic elements and layout. When the paper wasn't totally ignoring the women's tournament, it framed the event as an afterthought. When the Times referred to the NCAA Tournament, it meant the men's event. The Times also used stereotypical gender roles as the basis for many stories: for instance, male players were often lauded for their ability to take over the game while female players were praised when they shared the spotlight. Using these and other elements, The Times framed the women's tournament as an unimportant event.

In *The Final Four: A Pictorial History of the NCAA Basketball Classic*, Richard Whittingham recounts the winners and losers of the NCAA basketball tournament from its beginnings in 1939 to the early 1980s.[1] The book tells the story of the men who won the big games, and those who came up short, complete with hundreds of words and pictures of diving and leaping young men, as well as screaming coaches. The book appears to cover everything. Yet there is no mention of the women's champions. Although women have been participating in their own NCAA Tournament since 1982, Whittingham's work seems to be a blue print for coverage of the event. Women's basketball has been often trivialized and generally ignored by the media since its inception in 1891. Even today, as the sport gains popularity with the emergence of exciting players like National Team members Sheryl Swoopes and Rebecca Lobo and the year-long tour by the 1996 Olympic team, women's basketball is still treated as a minor event by newspaper sports departments. In 1995, for instance, *The New York Times* trivialized the women's tournament by treating it like an unloved step-child of the "real" event -- the men's tournament. This paper will explore how *The New York Times'* coverage of the 1995 women's NCAA Tournament served to deny the event's importance.

THEORY

The Times' coverage actually framed the women's tournament as the "other" tournament and the men's tournament as the "important" one. Framing, according to Robert Entman, is the act of selecting certain aspects of an ideology and communicating them in such a way as to promote one point of view.[2] Frames, Entman explains, can define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest

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[1] Richard Whittingham, *The Final Four: A Pictorial History of the NCAA Basketball Classic*. (Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc. 1983).

[2] Richard Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 4 (1993): 52.

remedies. In order to work, framing relies on salience, making a small amount of information more noticeable or memorable to an audience. This is done through the use of placement, repetition and association with familiar symbols.[3] A newspapers' repeated use of a graphic, for example, can help frame an ongoing story, such as the NCAA Tournament. What is not printed also helps frame events. As Entman says, "Frames select and call attention to particular aspects of the reality described, which logically means that frames simultaneously direct attention away from other aspects."[4] A newspaper can frame an event as unimportant by not writing about it at all. *The New York Times* framed the 1995 women's NCAA Basketball Tournament through its use of writing, graphic elements and story placement.

RELATED LITERATURE

Much has been written about the sociological aspect of women in sports. Timothy J. Curry and Robert Jiobu compare the plight of female athletes to that of African Americans.

> The stereotypes were so widespread, so imperceptible, so insidious that those who bore the onus came to believe them -- a situation called `false consciousness.' Just as blacks at one time suffered the false consciousness of believing they were inferior to whites, so too have women been socialized to accept `their' place, an acceptance which automatically makes them second-class citizens. [5]

To stay in their "place," according to Curry and Jiobu, women have been expected to be refined, dependent on men and ignorant of sports. These false stereotypes, the authors say, have helped justify the exclusion of females from many aspects of life, including the world of sports.[6]

M. Ann Hall has explored the idea of feminist epistemology: First, does it exist,

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[3] Ibid., 53.

[4] Ibid., 54.

[5] Curry, Timothy J. & Jiobu, Robert M. *Sports: A Social Perspective*. Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1984 p. 161.

[6] Ibid.

and second, how does it relate to women in sports? Standpoint epistemology is the concept that oppressed people see events from their own perspective -- the correct perspective. In other words, the view of the mainstream is incorrect, even though it is easier for the powerful group to make its perspective seem right.[7] Hall posits that because women live in a male world, all knowledge is seen through male eyes, and this knowledge is sometimes confusing to women.[8]

Although it is a young field, there is a growing amount of literature about the coverage of female athletes. Michael A. Messner writes that although female athletes have challenged the male-dominated system, "the framing of the female athlete by the sports media" is one aspect working against the cause of women in sports.[9] Messner blames the male domination of sports on the fact that the rise in sports and recreation from the 1890s to the 1920s coincided with a rise in American industry. Because of increased industry, fewer men owned businesses or controlled labor, and this caused men to fear a loss of masculinity. Sports gave men a chance to be masculine again.[10] Sports thus became a male domain, and female athletes were either ignored or trivialized by the mostly male sports media. As Messner states, "The outstanding female athlete is portrayed as an exception that proves the rule, thus reinforcing traditional stereotypes about femininity."[11] Messner goes on to say that this stereotyping is bound to change (and is changing) because women athletes -- an oppositional group -- have been accepted by many in the mainstream. Today, members of the sports media are more objective; they expect women to prove they can

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7 M. Ann Hall, "Epistemological Questions in the Social Analysis of Sport," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 2 (1985): 30-31.

8 Ibid. 26.

9 Michael A. Messner, "Sports and Male Domination: The Female Athlete as Contested Ideological Terrain," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5 (1988): 198.

10 Ibid., 199-200.

11 Ibid., 205

be great athletes.[12] Messner concludes, however, that the media are still partly at fault. "And the media's framing of male and female athletes will continue to present major obstacles for any fundamental challenge to the present commercialized and male-dominant structure of organized athletics."[13]

Margaret Carlisle Duncan and Cynthia A. Hasbrook used television coverage to determine if the "relative exclusion of women from team sports and from certain individual sports constitute a symbolic denial of power."[14] The authors rely heavily on Ricoeurian hermeneutics -- in short, a way of studying actions and words as text with a meaning that is distinct from the one the author or speaker may have intended.[15] The study examines television transcripts from the 1986 men's and women's NCAA Division I Championship Games. The authors conclude that the basketball coverage constituted a "symbolic denial of power" for the women and a "symbolic confirmation of team" for the men for several reasons. First, the introduction of the two teams competing for the women's championship (Southern California and Texas) was actually an introduction of star player Cheryl Miller of Southern California. Texas was taking on Miller, not Southern California, as the Lady Longhorns were introduced as "her opponents."[16] The men's opening commentary did not emphasize the individual, instead merely introduced the Duke Blue Devils and the Louisville Cardinals. As for the games themselves, the women's commentators continued to refer to individuals while the men's announcers referred to the school names or team mascots.[17] Another way power was denied for the women but confirmed for the men was through the

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12 Ibid., 206.

13 Ibid. 208

14 Margaret Carlisle Duncan & Cynthia A. Hasbrook, "Denial of Power in Televised Women's Sports," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5 (1988):4

15 Ibid., 5-7.

16 Ibid.,10.

17 Ibid.

commentators' descriptions of the action. While play of the women generally was described in aesthetic terms such as "so fun to watch," "pretty" and "beautiful," the analysts most often referred to the male players' athletic skills, using words like "great," "powerful" and "pure." The men made "brilliant shots" or "smart fouls." No remarks on the telecasts attributed the women's play to their knowledge or mental capacity.[18] Finally, while the men's play-by-play focused on offense, defense and specific plays, that of the women's game focused on player histories and past injuries.[19] The authors seem to ignore the possibility that more talented, experienced announcers work on the men's games. They concluded that although the women's Championship Game is important, it is portrayed by the media as "neither a real team sport nor a real game,"[20] saying, "When women are allowed inside TV's hallowed arena, it denigrates them by conjoining images of female strength with images of female weakness."[21]

Pamela J. Creedon discusses how magazines have responded to women as athletes, concentrating on the two major waves of athletic feminism in the twentieth century -- the 1920s-early '30s and the 1970s. She also discusses some of the problems faced by publishers of all-women's sports magazines, for example: selling advertising, creating an agenda and appeasing homophobes as well as homosexuals.[22] Through an examination of 3,723 feature articles in America's most popular sports magazine, Angela Lumpkin and Linda D. Williams came to the conclusion that *Sports Illustrated* perpetuates and reinforces the traditional stereotypes of blacks and women in sports. The study revealed, among other things,

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[18] Ibid., 11.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 19.

[22] Pamela J. Creedon, "From Whalebone to Spandex: Women and Sports Journalism in American Magazines, Photography and Broadcasting," *Women, Media and Sport: Challenging Gender Values* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, Pamela J. Creedon, Ed., 1994) pp. 108-158.

that 90.8 percent of the feature articles were about men and that stories on women tended to be shorter in length.[23] In defense of *Sports Illustrated,* the authors attributed part of the reason for the bias to the fact that the magazine has always had a large majority of male readers and that the most popular sports are those involving males. They also state that the problem is caused by a cultural bias, rather than a deliberate discriminatory policy by the magazine's editors or writers. Another study that looked at magazines was done by Dan C. Hilliard, who examined the treatment of top-ranked men's and women's tennis players from 1979-1983.[24] While the articles on women showed them being overcome by their flaws, the men overcame their negative traits. According to Hilliard, "The articles reinforce the concept of professional sports as a male preserve, while suggesting an underlying traditionally feminine gender role for the female athletes."[25] The author blames this unequal treatment on the commercial sponsorship of professional tennis. He says that because sponsors want feminine players to sell their products, women must portray the traditional gender roles of dependency and frailty, and this is why they are so trivialized in the media. Men, in contrast, do not need to put on an act for their sponsors, who want them to portray a masculine image.[26]

In another study, Duncan looked at whether or not photographs further patriarchal readings and emphasize sexual differences.[27] She writes that because most illustrated sports magazines are intended to be read from the "male gaze" perspective, the majority of photographs of women are intended to appeal to the

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23 Angela Lumpkin & Linda D. Williams, "An Analysis of Sports Illustrated Feature Articles, 1954-1987," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 8 (1991): 16-32.

24 Dan C. Hilliard, "Media Images of Male and Female Professional Athletes: An Interpretive Analysis of Magazine Articles." *Sociology of Sport Journal 1 (1984):251-262.*

25 Ibid., 251.

26 Ibid., 261

27 Margaret Carlisle Duncan, "Sports Photographs and Sexual Difference: Images of Women and Men in the 1984 and 1988 Olympic Games," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 7 (1990): 22-43.

heterosexual male audience.[28] She contends that the poses, physical appearance, body position, emotional displays and camera angles all contribute to emphasize the sexual difference: *"Focusing on female difference is a political strategy that places women in a position of weakness.* [Italics included] Sport photographs that emphasize the otherness of women enable patriarchal ends."[29]

Finally, Nancy Theberge, a professor of kinesiology at the University of Waterloo, and Alan Cronk, a copy editor at the Winston-Salem Journal, conducted a 14-month study of the methods used in the sports department of a 40,000-circulation daily newspaper. Their research revealed that the biggest barrier to better coverage of women's sports is not the operation of the sports department but rather the social organization of sports in North America and its domination by revenue-driven spectator sports intended for male audiences. The authors come to the conclusion that, because of the way the sports world is organized, sports sections must rely on three things: wire services, well-established sources and a constant layout structure. The first two generally supply news on male sports, while the third makes it difficult for other news to find a spot in the section.[30]

The literature described above is quite interesting, but it fails to cover some important issues. For instance, none of these studies focuses on newspaper coverage of female athletes. This paper will examine newspaper coverage. .Also, the "Denial of Power in Televised Women's Sports" article was written eight years ago, and the sport of women's basketball has grown exponentially since then. This study attempts to fill in some of the gaps in the literature.

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[28] Ibid., 28.

[29] Ibid., 40.

[30] Nancy Theberge & Alan Cronk. "Work Routines in Newspaper Sports Departments and the Coverage of Women's Sports," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 3 (1986): 195-203.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Does *The New York Times* ' coverage of the 1995 men's and women's NCAA basketball tournaments frame the women's event as unimportant?

2. If so, how?

3. What does this say about the *Times* ' attitude toward women in sports?

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a quantitative and qualitative comparison of the newspaper coverage of the 1995 women's and men's NCAA basketball tournaments, examining coverage of the three-week event from a national perspective through *The New York Times (Times).* The *Times* covers national college basketball throughout the season, and since no New York City teams made the Final Four and the men's and women's tournaments took place in Seattle and Minneapolis, respectively, there should be no local bias. (Although the Connecticut women's team won the tournament, I doubt the *Times* has a bias toward the school, located more than 100 miles away.)

Dates covered are Monday, March 13 (the day the tournament schedule was first printed) to Wednesday, April 5 (two days after the men's final), thus allowing for all the previews and one day of follow-up stories on the event. Although the study focused on all the NCAA basketball tournament stories in the sports section, articles on page A1 and in other sections were examined when they ran.

First, the amount of articles, pictures and graphics about the men's and women's tournaments were noted. Lengths were examined, as were sizes of graphics. Placement in the paper and in the section was looked at, as well. Stories were broken down into two categories: 1) straight previews or game covers, and 2) features and columns (stories that focus in depth on a particular person, event or issue). Next, the writing itself was examined. How are the tournaments themselves

described? How are the women and men players and coaches described? For what are the players praised and for what are they reprimanded? Which players are singled out, and why? Who is quoted? What do the headlines and graphics say? All of these elements should work together to frame the tournaments according to the *Times'* ideology.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Number of Articles

Not surprisingly, the study found more than three times as many stories on the men's tournament (ninety-three) than the women's (twenty-eight). Approximately half of the stories on both the men's and women's event were features or columns -- forty-eight for the men and thirteen for the women. Another feature discussed both the men's and women's tournament. During the twenty-four-day period studied, that breaks down to 3.88 stories per day on the men's tournament and 1.17 per day on the women's event. As for features, there were two per day on the men's tournament and 0.54 per day on the women's tournament. The columns and features were split into three categories -- those about players, those about coaches and those concerning other subjects (for example, the whole team, a particular game or an incident during a game). The results of this breakdown were intriguing: While the number of features on male players (eighteen) was three times the amount on their coaches (six), there were just two features on female players, compared with four on women's coaches. This bring up an interesting question: Why do the stories on women's basketball focus so much on the coaches, while the men's stories focus more on the players?

A story on Tennessee women's coach Pat Summitt epitomizes this point. The fourth paragraph states, "All 12 (Tennessee) players were High School All-Americans." The very next paragraph negates the importance of those women, turning

instead to the coach, saying, "But most of all, Tennessee has the coach."[31] Furthermore, the reporter failed to quote any players; the only person quoted in this sixteen-inch story is Summitt herself. Another story, this one focusing on Stanford Coach Tara Van Derveer, opens with the fact that Van Derveer learned from two of the best male coaches -- Bob Knight of Indiana and former Berkeley coach Pete Newell -- and goes on to mention that Van Derveer has 403 wins in seventeen seasons. One can infer from this story that the *Times* believes Van Derveer is a good coach because of the male influence. A quote from Newell even compares Van Derveer to her male counterparts: "I think Tara has a better mind for the game than many of the male coaches."[32] Neither the this story nor the Summitt piece are accompanied by a photograph, however, two features on Connecticut Coach Geno Auriemma included pictures of the male coach, and a feature on the Georgia women's team ran with a picture of Coach Andy Landers (also a man).[33] On top of this, the Georgia story contains no quotes from any current Georgia players, instead the author quotes Landers, his mother and a former player from Roane State, where Landers once coached.[34] Reporter Frank Litsky refers to Connecticut as "Auriemma's team" and "an extension of its coach."[35] All of this serves to frame the coaches of the women's teams as more important than the players themselves.

Length of articles

The average lengths of the stories were about even for men (15.37 inches) and

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31 Frank Litsky, "Full-Court Discipline for Summitt," *The New York Times*, March 31, 1995, p. B9.

32 Samantha Stevenson, "Stanford's Teacher Learns from the Best," *The New York Times*, March 28, 1995, p. B16.

33 Frank Litsky, "UConn's Auriemma has Celebrity Status," *The New York Times*, March 23, 1995, p. B16; Ira Berkow, "Auriemma Helps Pave the Way at UConn," *The New York Times*, April 2, 1995, p. 8-2; Samantha Stevenson, "Georgia in the Party Without an Invitation," *The New York Times*, March 30, 1995, p. B12.

34 Stevenson, "Georgia in Party Without an Invitation."

35 Litsky, "UConn's Auriemma has Celebrity Status."

women (14.74). The average length of features was 15.19 for the men and 15.25 for the women.

Graphic elements

As with the number of articles, there were more than three times as many photographs about the men's tournament (fifty-six) than about the women's tournament (sixteen) -- that's 2.3 per day for the men and .66 per day for the women. The number of informational graphics (not including indented graphics) for the men (twenty-seven) was three times as many as for the women (nine).

The *Times'* use of graphics helped frame the women's tournament as trivial. One example is the use of indented graphics; the men's regional roundups are accompanied by indents such as "EAST," "SOUTHEAST," "WEST," and "MIDWEST," while the women's roundups are generally all rolled into one with the indent "WOMEN." This is just another way the Times frames the women's tournament as an unimportant story compared to the men's event. A second way graphics are used to frame the tournament is with information-packed graphics that either accompany stories or stand by themselves. These elements often ignored the fact there even was a women's tournament. For example, on the first day of the paper's coverage of the tournaments, two graphics ran side by side on the front page of the sports section: One, titled "Championship March," measured 9.25x2.5 inches and included the four number one seeds, the conferences with the most teams, five surprise entrants and a picture. The other, titled "Women's Draw," was 2x2.5 inches in size and included only the four number one seeds.[36] This helps start the *Times'* coverage of the tournaments by framing the two events: not only does the men's graphic have more information, but it never mentions the words "men" or "men's" -- it is obvious, the paper seems to say, that the NCAA Tournament is played by men. The women's tournament

[36] "Championship March," and "Women's Draw." *The New York Times*. March 13, 1995, p. C1.

is a separate entity, and thus not really important. The *Times* continues to build on this frame for the next two days. On March 14, lead art on the sports front is a 6.5x10.5 inch graphic entitled "The Madness: Best Bets and Geography 101." This extremely informative piece covers everything from the location of unknown schools like Murray State and Weber State to the reporter's picks for the championship game. The only time the word "men" or "women" appears is in a note saying that the Connecticut men and women both have a good chance of making the Final Four. So the editors and writer expect the reader to know that the information is all about the men's tournament -- the only tournament that matters. Why else would there even be a graphic?

As the final games approached, the disparity became even clearer. On Monday, March 27, the *Times* ran a graphic showing the Final Four men's teams and when they were playing the next weekend. The men's Final Four had been determined in four games Saturday and Sunday, so it was quite timely for the graphic to run on Monday. The women's Final Four had been determined early Sunday morning, since some of the games were played on the West Coast. Despite the fact that the editors at the *Times* knew the women's Final Four participants hours before the men's field was determined, there was no women's Final Four graphic in Monday's paper. This is further proof that the Times framed the men's tournament as important and the women's as inferior. As the Final Four went on, so did the framing. The men's final took place on Monday, April 3, while the women's championship was played on Sunday, April 2. On the day of the men's final, the *Times* ran a 9x9-inch chart matching up the two teams -- UCLA and Arkansas. The box included full rosters for both teams, team and individual player statistics and two pictures of players.[37] There was no such box previewing the women's final. On the day after the UConn women's team won the championship over Tennessee, completing a perfect 35-0 season, the

[37] *The New York Times*, April 3, 1995, p. C6.

Times did run a graphic listing other men's and women's teams that finished the season undefeated. It was in no way as elaborate as the men's graphic. Finally, the day following the men's final, won by UCLA, the *Times* featured two graphics on the same page. One of these measured 5.5x9.5 inches and contained UCLA's shot charts for both halves of the game, the field goal and free throw percentages for the team and two star players, and a 5x6.5 inch picture of a UCLA player.[38] The other graphic focused on Arkansas star Corliss Williamson, who was shut down by the UCLA defense in the game. The graphic, which was not very elaborate and only about two by three inches, showed Williamson's point totals for each of the games in the tournament, but it was more than any individual female player got. .[39] The use of graphics is just another manner employed by the *Times* to frame the women's tournament as unimportant.

Teasers

Newspapers often use strategically placed graphic elements called "teasers" to let readers know what stories they might enjoy on another page. The *Times*, for instance, teased the NCAA Tournament not only from page A1, but also from the front page of the Metro Section, because the sports section was actually inside the Metro Section Tuesday through Friday. During the twenty-four days studied, the *Times* teased the men's tournament thirteen times from page A1 or the Metro Section front, while the women's tournament was teased just four times. This disparity of teasers serves to frame the women's tournament as something for which readers need not turn the pages to see.

Agate

Yet another instance of framing can be seen in the use of "agate" -- the

38 "UCLA Paints a Masterpiece." *The New York Times*. April 4, 1995, p. B11.
39 *The New York Times*, April 4, p. B11.

extremely small type that includes things like scores, box scores and schedules. The women's NCAA Tournament schedule appeared on the *Times'* agate page (separated from the other college basketball news) thirteen out of twenty-four days, as opposed to just three days for the men. On days that the schedule did not appear on the agate page, the *Times* ran a full tournament bracket -- much easier to read than the agate type. Not only is the small agate type hard on the eyes, but the bracket clearly shows who a team plays next, while the agate schedule forces a reader to search. Box scores were also a point of disparity -- the *Times* ran box scores for all sixty-three men's game but just seventeen of sixty-three women's games. Also, while the paper used extended box scores (containing more individual statistics than the regular box scores) for both the men's final and semifinals, only the women's final game merited an extended box score. Another way agate is used is to list interesting facts that simply cannot fit anywhere else -- such as past winners, scoring leaders and top conferences. The Times used agate in this manner six times for the men's tournament and just once for the women. This use of agate type helps complete the frame.

Placement

Stories and/or pictures appeared on page A1 at about the same rate -- five times for the men and four for the women, and while both the men's and women's champions earned an A1 presence the day following their title wins, the placement of those stories was intriguing. A picture of the victorious UCLA men's team was placed on the very top of the page, while a picture and story on the University of Connecticut women's team was nine inches below the top. The reason there was only a photo of the men's champion was most likely because the game took place in Seattle, Wash., and finished too late to allow for a story on the East Coast. The women's final, on the other hand, was played in Minneapolis and ended before eight o'clock p.m. While

appearances on page A1 were about equal, there was quite a disparity when it came to the front page of the sports section. Men's stories appeared on the sports front thirty-one times, while women's articles appeared there just four times. Another story on the front page of the sports section concerned both the men's and women's tournaments. In other words, thirty-three percent of all the men's stories at least began on the sports front, while only fourteen percent of the women's stories began on the sports front. Furthermore, while forty-three percent of the men's photographs appeared on the sports front, only eleven percent of the women's photos did. Finally, although twelve of the twenty-seven men's graphics appeared on the sports front, only two of the nine women's graphics did. The front page is the first place people look -- and the last for many -- so the stories on the front page are all some people see. Many readers of the *Times* missed just about all of the women's tournament.

Writing

The first taste of a story that readers get -- and many times the only taste -- is the lead. The *Times'* coverage of the 1995 tournaments used the leads of stories to frame the women's tournament as trivial compared to the men's. With just one exception, every story on the women's tournament used the word "women" or "women's" in the first three paragraphs. For example, stories often began in this way: "On Thursday ... the Virginia Tech women's team returned from its locker room to watch Connecticut play Maine,"[40] and "During the women's Final Four Saturday..."[41] One might counter that this is the only way to tell which tournament the author is covering, but, there was no mention of the words "men" or "men's" in the first three paragraphs of any of the 93 stories on the men's event. The articles on the men's tournament started something like, "The Arkansas Razorbacks ...." or "The UConn Huskies ..." This creates the impression that there is really only one NCAA tournament -- with men as the

[40] Frank Litsky, "Huskies? Why Worry, Virginia Tech says." *The New York Times*, March 18, 1995, p. 33.
[41] Litsky, "UConn Looks in Mirror and Stares at Stanford," *The New York Times*, April 1, 1995, p. 31.

competitors. The "women's" tournament is something else, something extra, which does not really matter and does not need to be covered as thoroughly.

The authors' descriptions of the players also serve to frame the women's tournament as inferior. For instance, while male players are lauded for being aggressive, females are showcased for their ability to share. Take, for example, a story about Wake Forest standout Randolph Childress, who just prior to the NCAAs accumulated 107 points and 21 assists during three games in the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament. Says the author, "Wake Forest guard Randolph Childress is accustomed to commanding everything on a basketball court, from his teammates to his outward emotions to the games themselves."[42] In the same article, Childress' coach attributes the star's ability to dominate to "a combination of all the good things that make up a basketball players."[43] In contrast, a story on Connecticut All-American Rebecca Lobo states "[Lobo] is part of a game that is substantially different from the men's game, one in which egos seem to meld into the concept of the team, and which makes the game so satisfying for a basketball fan."[44] In another article, Lobo is chastised by her coach for being too team-oriented. After the coach, Geno Auriemma, explained how he had to be selfish when he was a young player in order to stay on the court, the coach says "Girls don't think like that. Rebecca Lobo can be eight feet from the basket and have a clean shot. A teammate is six feet from the basket, but she's a bad shooter. Rebecca will pass to her to show she's a nice girl."[45] The story did not mention that one of the reasons Lobo passes so much is that Connecticut won its games by an average of 35 points. Why should the best player continue to score

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42 Barry Jacobs, "Childress: A Field General With Heart and a Clutch Shot," *The New York Times*, March 16, 1995, p. B17.

43 Ibid.

44 Ira Berkow, "UConn Can Count On Lobo," *The New York Times*, April 3, 1995, p. C1.

45 Frank Litsky, "Lobo is Too Generous Distributing Her Passes," *The New York Times*, March 29, 1995, p. B8.

when her team is up by so much? Another story on the Connecticut women's team describes the Huskies as "graceful athletes who have become role models for girls across the state." According to the author, girls like the team because of their "gracious, unselfish playing style and their good-natured interaction with their fans."[46] One youngster, whose age is not given, praises the Huskies because they are not selfish, saying "Other players just go for the ball and hog it, but this team always shares it."[47] The frame here seems to be saying two things. First, the Connecticut women's team is worthy of praise because the players have many of the qualities women are supposed to have, such as gracefulness and unselfishness. Secondly, although the Connecticut team is the National Champion, it is still not as good as any men's team, simply because it is unselfish.

Yet another way the paper framed the women's tournament as unimportant was in the way it covered the outcome of two games that took place on the same day. On March 25, the men's and women's teams from Connecticut both played for the right to go to the Final Four. While the women won, the men lost. The *Times'* coverage of this event made it appear as if the women's victory was absolutely no solace for the men's loss. Although the paper ran a picture of the women's team celebrating its victory on page A1, the coverage in the sports section was clearly biased toward the men. First, the men's loss to UCLA is the top story on the sports front, and while a 6.5x7.5-inch picture accompanies the men's story, the only photo from the women's game is a 1.25x2.75-inch shot indented in the column to the left, which is also about the two games. The headlines also serve to frame the story: The lead story is titled "UCLA Spoils Half of Connecticut's Big Day" -- in other words, even though the women won, the day was not a success for the school. The women's story, "UConn Women Face

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46 Abby Goodnough, "Lady Huskies Win It All, and Girls Across Connecticut Cheer," *The New York Times*, April 3, 1995, p. B5.
47 Ibid.

Music and Win," is another example of the paper using the word "women" to frame the tournament as a separate entity that is unimportant. The headline on the column, "Husky Fans Celebrate, Then Suffer," seems to say, although the women won, the men's loss is more important. The headlines just scratch the surface, though. The column starts like this:

> Yesterday had the potential of being the most glorious day yet for the state of Connecticut. Shortly after high noon, the undefeated and top-ranked women held off Virginia, 67-63, to qualify for the final four in Minneapolis next weekend. This extremely promising day went sour a few hours later. All Connecticut fidgeted in front of television sets as the men -- neither undefeated nor top-ranked but full of ambition -- were knocked off by top-seeded UCLA, 102-96, in Oakland.[48]

The story goes on to say how much college basketball has grown in Connecticut in the past ten years. The column eventually becomes a lament for the men and ends with Connecticut fans suffering, not celebrating. This is the ultimate insult to the women's team. How can a loss by one team completely negate a victory by another? Only if the win occurred in a tournament that did not mean anything, and according to the *Times*, that is exactly what happened. Although the column does not jump to another page, the layout of the jumps of the other two articles also frames the story. The men's jump (19.5 inches) is placed above the women's jump (sixteen inches). More important, though, is the quote graphically pulled out of the men's jump: "Two teams from the same school in the Final Four? Almost."[49] This quote serves to further frame the event as a letdown, rather that a celebration.

The framing of the Connecticut story goes on into the next day, as the *Times* continues to lament the men's loss, thus detracting from the women's victory. While

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[48] George Vecsey, "Husky Fans Celebrate, Then Suffer," *The New York Times*, March 26, 1995, p. 8-1.
[49] Malcolm Moran, "UCLA Spoils Half of Connecticut's Big Day," *The New York Times*, March 26, 1995, p. 8-3.

the women's story is placed above the men's this time, once again the pulled quotes serve to frame the event. The women's story is accompanied by the quote, "Against Virginia, the Huskies showed they were vulnerable,"[50] while the men's story contains the pulled quote, "The party never ends, but the Huskies have been told to go home."[51] These quotes say two things: First, the "real" Huskies (the men) are going home, and second, although the women are winning, they are not invincible. More importantly, the layout, which includes a picture from the men's game but none from the women's contest, shows that the men's team is the one that counts; no matter how many wins the women get, the men's outcome is more important.

One final way the writing frames the women's tournament lies in how the paper simply ignores the women's event. This begins the very first day of coverage with a teaser above the index on page A1. The teaser reads: "Sixty-four teams, including powerhouses like Kansas and underdogs like Manhattan and Murray State, are in the NCAA basketball tournament."[52] In actuality, 128 teams took part in the tournaments. By ignoring the women's teams completely, this teaser tells the reader, there is really only one tournament -- played by men -- and anything else is not worth a story. If the women's tournament was important, the paper would have mentioned it in the teaser. Another case in which the paper ignored the women's tournament occurred five days later, when a column on the front page of the sports section read "Stanford Finally Wins One."[53] The column focused on the fact that Stanford had won its first NCAA Tournament game since 1942. There was no mention of "men" or "women." Taken literally, this column is completely wrong, since the Stanford women's team has a record of twenty-four victories and seven losses (and two National Titles) since the

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50 Frank Litsky, "Stanford Has Height to Test UConn," *The New York Times*, March 27, 1995, p. C6.
51 Malcolm Moran, "It was a Good Year for UConn, but ..." *The New York Times*, March 27, 1995, p. C6.
52 "Hello, we're Murray State," *The New York Times*, March 13, 1995, p. A1.
53 George Vecsey, "Stanford Finally Wins One," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1995, p. 31.

women's event began in 1982. This brings up an intriguing question: Would an editor allow a similar story about a women's team to run without telling the reader whether it was referring to men or women? The answer seems obvious, since none of the ninety-three men's stories examined ever referred to the teams with a gender qualifier in the first three paragraphs, but all but one of the women's stories used a qualifier. Another example of the *Times'* ignorance of the women's tournament came on March 21, when a column on the sports front focused on all the close games in the "tournament" so far. The reporter says that "13 out of the 48" games have been close.[54] Once again, if the sentence is taken literally, the writer has erred -- up to the date of publication ninety-six games had been played. To further prove the point, a graphic accompanying the story bears the headline, "Some of the highlights from the NCAA Tournament so far." All the "highlights" recall games involving men's teams. Finally, the story on "close games" completely ignores Alabama's 121-120 win over Duke two nights before -- a quadruple-overtime affair that set a record as the longest women's NCAA Tournament game of all time. If that isn't a "highlight," something is definitely wrong. To add insult to injury, the coverage of this record-setting game left much to be desired. First, the seven inches devoted to the game were part of a 12.5-inch preview of Alabama's next game against Connecticut.[55] Since it ended late on the morning of March 19, it did not get into the paper until the next day, and even then the story failed to mention how the game ended. A one-point victory in four overtimes? It might have been thrilling, but the *Times'* readership never found out.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper examined three questions. First, did the *Times*, through its coverage of the 1995 men's and women's NCAA basketball tournaments, frame the

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54 Malcolm Moran, "Fortunes Rise and Fall at the Buzzer," *The New York Times*, March 21, 1995, p. B11.
55 "Up Next for Connecticut: Huffing and Puffing 'Bama," *The New York Times*, March 20, 1995, p. C6.

women's event as unimportant? Second, how did the Times accomplish this framing? It is clear from above discussion that the *Times'* coverage -- including writing, use of graphic elements, teasers, agate and placement -- clearly framed the women's tournament as trivial and far less important than the men's event. This frame has many functions -- it denies women who work hard all season to make it to the tournament the satisfaction of seeing their names in print; it perpetuates the myth that women should not be aggressive if they want to be accepted by society; and it furthers the misnomer that women's athletics are not as important as men's sports. The frame presented by the *Times* is one of separateness -- the women's tournament is the "other" tournament, as opposed to the "real" tournament, played by men.

While Margaret Carlisle Duncan was talking about photographs, she just as easily could have been discussing the *Times'* coverage of the 1995 women's NCAA Basketball Tournament when she wrote,"*Focusing on female difference is a political strategy that places women in a position of weakness.* [Italics included] Sport photographs that emphasize the otherness of women enable patriarchal ends."[56] The *Times'* coverage framed the story in such a way that readers could see the women's tournament as unimportant, therefore putting the female players in a position of weakness. This brings up the third research question asked in this study: What does the *Times'* framing of the tournaments say about the paper's attitude toward women in sports? While one might infer from the above findings and discussion that the editors and writers at the *Times* view women's athletics as trivial, there are many possible explanations for the frame. First, the men's tournament has been played since 1939, as opposed to 1982 for the women's, so tradition and history factor into the coverage.[57] Secondly, as Timothy J. Curry and Robert Jiobu write, the widespread

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56 Ibid., 40.

57 Richard Whittingham, *The Final Four: A Pictorial History of the NCAA Basketball Classic.* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, Inc. 1983) p. 1.

stereotypes of female athletes are simply a part of the bigger issue of how society treats women in general,[58] and the newspaper might simply reflect that. Despite these facts, the truth is that there is a problem with the *Times'* coverage of the Women's NCAA Basketball Tournament, and something must be done about it. These conclusions bring up questions for further study, including how newspapers' framing of women's basketball affects young female athletes and how the coverage of women's basketball has changed over the years. These are important issues that need to be addressed and discussed if coverage is to improve.

58 Timothy Curry & Robert M. Jiobu, *Sports: A Social Perspective*. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1984.) p. 161.

STORY BREAKDOWN

(Breakdown of 121 New York Times articles examined over a 24-day period from day after field was announced through two days after men's final.)

Men's Stories

Total articles - 93 (77 percent)

Straight previews/covers - 45 (48 percent of men's stories)

Features/columns - 48 (52 percent of men's stories)

Stories per day - 3.88

Features/columns per day - 2

Features/columns on players - 18 (37.5 percent of features on men)

Features/columns on coaches - 6 (12.5 percent of features on men)

Features/columns on other subjects - 24 (50 percent of features on men)

Women's Stories

Total articles - 28 (23 percent)

Straight previews/covers - 15 (54 percent of women's stories)

Features/columns - 13 (46 percent of women's stories)

Stories per day - 1.17

Features/columns per day - 0.54

Features/columns on players - 2 (15 percent of features on women)

Features/columns on coaches - 4 (31 percent of features on women)

Features/columns on other subjects - 7 (54 percent of features on women)

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